

**SUMMARY OF THE
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 26, 2000**

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference at 1 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on Tuesday, September 26, 2000. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Barbara Burmeister of the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss results of the PT subcommittee meeting, PT Fields of Testing (input for Chapter 1), comments related to microbiology, and method codes.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Burmeister reviewed the minutes from the teleconference on September 12, 2000. The committee agreed that the minutes are final. The status of the Action Items is as follows:

- C Ms. Barbara Burmeister has not yet responded to Ms. Reenie Parris about the Chapter 2 requirements for the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). She said that NIST is supposed to report failure rates and a list of complaints to NELAC in October. She will send a letter to NIST after comparing Appendix D to NIST/National Voluntary Laboratory Accreditation Program (NVLAP) Handbook 150-19.
- C Mr. Anand Mudambi arranged hotel reservations for the committee members attending the subcommittee meeting in Baltimore, MD.
- C Ms. Burmeister replied to Dr. Ken Jackson and recommended that the Program Policy and Structure Committee use their "Option 2" for the fields of testing matrices.
- C Mr. Matt Caruso will send a copy of New York's method codes in comma-separated (.csv) format to Mr. Ralph Obenauf and Mr. Chuck Wibby.
- C Ms. Burmeister has not yet sent a recommendation to the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) Accrediting Authority Group about the PT requirements for Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) methods. She said that she will send the recommendation to Ms. Jeanne Hankins first.
- C Ms. Burmeister is currently working on responses to recommendations for changes to the chapter that have been received from Ms. Jeri Long and Mr. Steve Nackord.
- C Mr. Matt Caruso sent a response to Ms. Burmeister for Mr. Nackord's comment about statistically-based acceptance criteria.

PT SUBCOMMITTEE FOR IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The PT subcommittee met at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Science Center located on the Fort George Meade Army Installation south of Baltimore, MD, on September 19 and 20, 2000. Mr. Larry Jackson said that it was a very worthwhile meeting and thanked those who participated. There were seventeen participants, with a good representation from laboratories, providers, and accrediting authorities. Minutes for the meeting were written by Ms. Burmeister.

Many issues were identified and reviewed. Of these, four major issues were identified that the group felt could be addressed and potential solutions provided:

1. Data reporting issues (chair: Mr. Tom Coyner)
 - Zeros, non-detects
 - Multiple methods
2. “Quick response”/corrective action studies (chair: Mr. Bennett Osborne)
 - Definition
 - Acceptance by Accrediting Authorities
3. Report format (chair: Mr. Bill Hahn)
4. Analyte/analyte groups for PT field of testing

Volunteer working groups have been formed for the first three issues (working group chairs are indicated beside each item). The fourth issue was not addressed by the subcommittee. It will be discussed at length during the Sixth NELAC Interim Meeting (NELAC 6i) in both the Proficiency Testing and Program Policy and Structure Committee sessions.

The working groups will try to develop recommendations for resolving these issues. Reports are due to Mr. Jackson and Ms. Burmeister by October 6, 2000. The committee hopes to have meaningful material for NELAC 6i. Ms. Burmeister said that she will ask the subcommittee working groups to bring handouts of their recommendations to NELAC 6i.

Mr. Jackson said that a second subcommittee meeting will probably be held in late January or early February 2001. The purpose will be to put together proposed language for the annual meeting.

FIELDS OF TESTING DISCUSSION (INPUT FOR CHAPTER 1)

Ms. Burmeister reviewed the discussion on Fields of Testing (particularly with respect to “analyte group”) from the September 12, 2000 teleconference. She then relayed information received from Dr. Ken Jackson about the Program Policy and Structure Committee’s discussion during their September 20, 2000 teleconference. The Program Policy and Structure Committee had considered presenting a model of “matrix-method-analyte/analyte group” for the NELAC Scope of Accreditation because of discussions at the Sixth NELAC Annual Meeting (NELAC 6). However, after deliberation, the committee decided that accreditation by analyte group would provide no advantage, and they proposed to present a model of “matrix-method-analyte” instead.

The PT Fields of Testing are currently organized as “program-matrix-analyte.” Ms. Burmeister suggested dropping “program” and adding “analyte group” so that the PT fields of testing (FOTs) would be organized as “matrix-analyte/analyte group.” This would differ from the model Chapter 1 is proposing for the scope of accreditation, however she reminded committee members that Chapters 1 and 2 are currently inconsistent as well. She then asked for discussion from committee members.

Mr. Mudambi said that “analyte group” would be easier to implement, but was unsure how this would fit in with state accreditation programs. Mr. Matt Caruso said that New York tracks accreditation by analyte. Accrediting authorities do not want to allow laboratories to routinely

fail the same analytes. Also, if a laboratory fails the PT for one analyte, it can retest for just that one analyte, rather than the whole group. A given analyte can be failed as long as it is not failed again in the next two successive PTs. If a laboratory routinely failed the same 10% of analytes, that would indicate a systematic problem.

The only benefit noted for PTs by “analyte group” is that a laboratory does not have to run a PT for every single analyte. A participant suggested that laboratories be allowed to run PTs by “analyte group” to achieve initial accreditation, and then continue PTs on an analyte by analyte basis.

Ms. Burmeister mentioned that one organization had requested PTs by analytical technique in addition to method. A participant pointed out that Chapter 1 has not defined “method.” Another participant suggested that “method” does not have to refer to a discrete EPA-approved method, it can allow multiple EPA methods or analytical techniques. The committee decided to ask Chapter 1 to define “method.” Ms. RaeAnn Haynes also volunteered to draft a definition for “method.”

The PT Committee agreed with the model of “matrix-method-analyte” for the Scope of Accreditation, as long as the definition of “method” is flexible enough to allow for more than one EPA-approved method and address analytical technique. Ms. Burmeister said that she will respond to the Program Policy and Structure Committee. She will also try to locate the language used in previous versions of Chapter 2 which describe use of the “80% passing rule” for initial accreditation. The committee will try to match the PT FOT with the NELAC Scope of Accreditation.

FIELDS OF TESTING (FOT) ERRATA SHEET

Mr. Wibby provided an update on the Fields of Testing Errata Sheet. He said that errors in the June 2000 PT FOT tables have been corrected and analyte numbers have been added to all analytes outside of EPA’s national program. A copy of the tables was sent to Mr. Bob Graves for review. Mr. Wibby incorporated EPA’s changes and the tables were distributed to the PT Committee for review. The addition of analyte numbers allows EPA’s database to accept data for all water analytes. However, solid waste analyte data will not be accepted at this time.

Mr. Wibby stated that EPA does prefer to assign the analyte codes, rather than NELAC. He also said that codes have already been assigned for the next most likely analytes to be added to the FOT tables. Although an analyte code may be repeated in various programs, the association of program code with analyte code produces a unique combination code. As long as the program code is provided, duplicate analyte codes will not be problematic.

Mr. Wibby said that he recently requested an editor to review the tables, and a few grammatical errors were found. He will make corrections and send the final FOT tables to Ms. Burmeister today. Ms. Burmeister said that she will then distribute the tables to Ms. Hankins and to all PT providers.

METHOD CODES

Mr. Ralph Obenauf provided an update on method codes. He said that the WordPerfect® document, which the committee has, contained descriptions in addition to method codes. The Excel® spreadsheet received from Mr. Caruso contained only method code and method name. The committee would like to have descriptions associated with the methods and codes in a database format.

Ms. Burmeister recalled that Mr. Coyner has this information in a database format already. Mr. Obenauf and Mr. Wibby will contact Mr. Coyner to request a copy. Mr. Wibby said that if they are unable to get the data from Mr. Coyner, they will go ahead and “cut and paste” the descriptions from the WordPerfect® document next week.

Ms. Burmeister said that materials for the NELAC 6i participant packets are due to Ms. Hankins by October 13, 2000. If they are unable to meet this deadline, she asked that they bring copies of the method codes to distribute during the PT Committee session.

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS RECEIVED

Microbiology

This discussion was begun on September 12, 2000, but due to lack of time, was continued today.

The Quality Systems Microbiology Subcommittee submitted recommendations (by Dr. Irene Ronning) for changes to Chapter 2 regarding proficiency testing for microbiological analyses.

First, Dr. Ronning stated that the current NELAC standards require PT be performed by program, matrix, analyte (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3). This requirement can result, depending on the methods for which a laboratory desires accreditation, in redundancy in some situations and insufficiencies in others. She recommended that PTs for microbiology be organized by technique.

One committee member asked whether adding a new appendix for microbiology PTs by method was an option. Another responded that there would be consistency issues by doing so.

This issue comes down to whether or not PTs are allowed by method. Ms. Haynes offered to draft a definition for “method” which could be used in both the NELAC Scope of Accreditation and the PT Fields of Testing.

Second, the QS Microbiology Subcommittee requested changes to Appendix E, Sections E.1.2 and E.3.2. They wanted to change the requirements for Clean Water Act (CWA) samples from one to three samples (for quantitative determination of total coliform or fecal coliform). They also wanted to change the requirements for passing to be three out of three samples having acceptable results.

Mr. Caruso stated that this change increases the odds of failing the PT and increases cost. He said that it provides no additional benefit to the AAs. This idea was addressed by the committee in the past and was rejected.

Ms. Burmeister will respond to the Quality Systems Subcommittee regarding these comments.

Questions from Accrediting Authority Teleconference

Ms. Haynes asked two questions which came up during an Accrediting Authority teleconference. First, she asked how multiple PT results by different methods for the same analyte are evaluated under the NELAC Standards. She said that Oregon has always required that laboratories perform drinking water PTs by method. Many laboratories have multiple results for each analyte for each PT. Ms. Burmeister said that this is one of the issues being discussed by the PT subcommittee. Their recommendations are due back by October 6, 2000, and the committee will plan to discuss the issue on the October 10, 2000 conference call.

Second, she asked whether the NELAC Board of Directors has emergency authority. She said that this is an issue with the Microbiology Subcommittee. For example, if EPA approves a new method for microbiology (e.g., PCR), which may be substantially different, then additions to the NELAC Standard may be required in order to meet EPA requirements for monitoring. Ms. Burmeister said that NELAC's policy on revision of standards does allow for emergency exceptions through the NELAC Board of Directors.

MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE

Ms. Cindy Nettrour said that there is no update from the Membership and Outreach Committee.

AGENDA FOR NELAC 6I

Ms. Burmeister reviewed the proposed agenda for the PT Committee session on November 1, 2000 (from 1:30 to 5:00 p.m.). Following introductions and Chapter 2 comment summary, the committee will allow approximately one hour to discuss implementation and standardization issues, ten minutes for discussing standardization of method codes, and then another hour for discussing PT Fields of Testing.

MISCELLANEOUS

The next committee teleconference is scheduled for October 10, 2000, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 26, 2000

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Ms. Barbara Burmeister will respond to Ms. Reenie Parris about the Chapter 2 requirements for NIST (from 8/15/00 teleconference).	
2.	Ms. Burmeister will send a recommendation to Ms. Jeanne Hankins about the PT requirements for RCRA methods. After it is reviewed, she will send it to the NELAP Accrediting Authority Group.	
3.	Ms. Burmeister will respond to comments received from Ms. Jeri Long, Mr. Steve Nackord, and the Quality Systems Microbiology Subcommittee.	
4.	Mr. Chuck Wibby will finalize the PT Fields of Testing Errata Sheet and send it to Ms. Burmeister.	9/26/00
5.	Ms. Burmeister will forward the PT Fields of Testing Errata Sheet to Ms. Hankins and all PT providers.	
6.	Ms. RaeAnn Haynes will draft a definition for "method."	
7.	Ms. Burmeister will respond to the Program, Policy and Structure Committee's decision not to accredit by "analyte group."	
8.	Ms. Burmeister will ask the PT Subcommittee for Implementation Issues to provide handouts of their recommendations at the NELAC VII PT session.	
9.	Mr. Caruso will send a copy of New York's method codes in comma-separated (.csv) format to Mr. Ralph Obenauf and Mr. Chuck Wibby.	
10.	The committee will try to match the PT FOT with the NELAC Scope of Accreditation.	
11.	Mr. Obenauf and Mr. Wibby will contact Mr. Coyner to request a database-format copy of methods and codes.	
12.	Ms. Burmeister will respond to the Quality Systems committee on their recommendations for changes to Appendix E.	

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PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 26, 2000**

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